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The President's Daily Brief

24 December 1971

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THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF

24 December 1971

PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

The North Vietnamese appear to be moving quickly across the Plaine des Jarres in Laos. *(Page 1)*

The Biharis in Bangla Desh who supported Islamabad are living in a state of terror, and many may die either by starvation or torture, according to our Consul General in Dacca. In Islamabad, President Bhutto is moving swiftly to reshape Pakistan's domestic and foreign policies and put his own stamp on the government. *(Page 2)*

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[redacted] India [redacted] *Page 3.* 50X1

Fidel Castro has lashed out at the US over the use of Panamanian-flag ships by Cuban exile groups. *(Page 4)*

At Annex [redacted] Soviet 50X1X1

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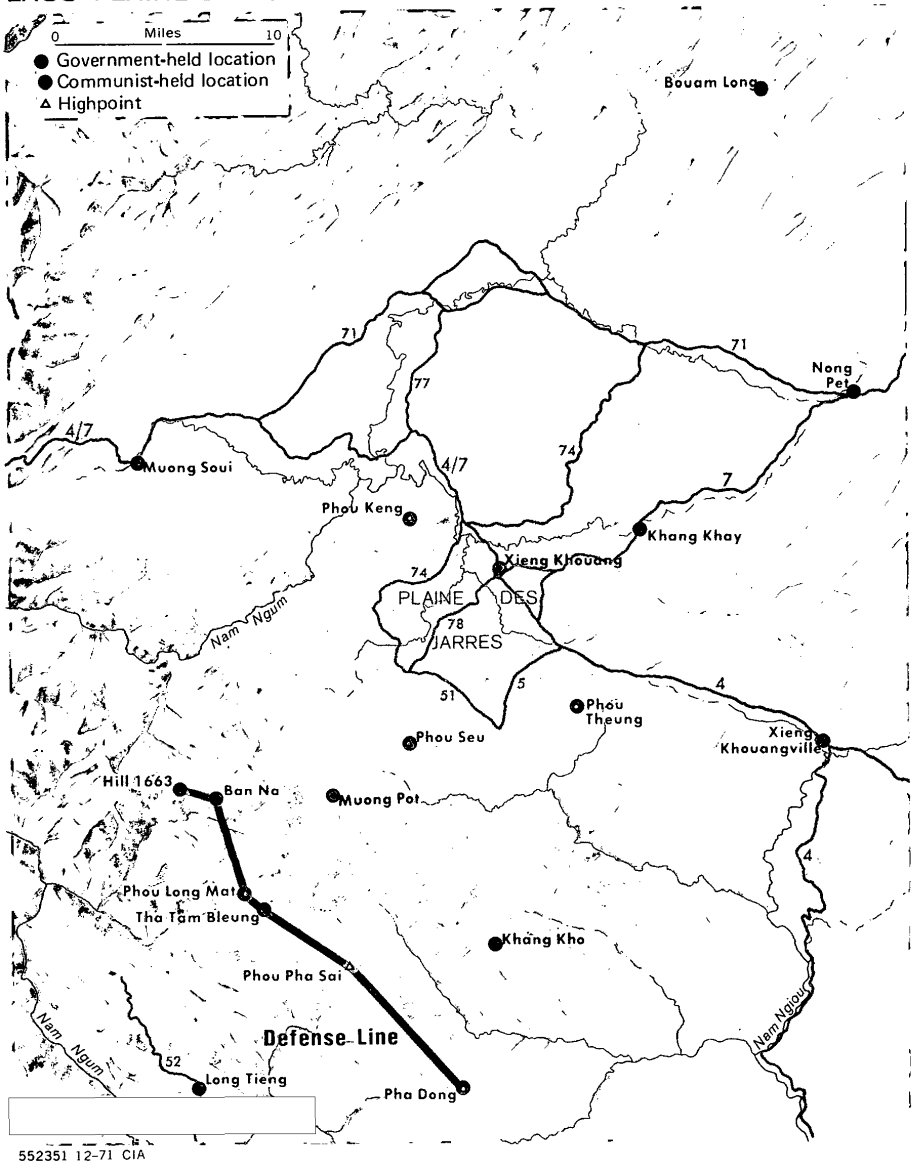
LAOS: PLAINE DES JARRES AREA



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LAOS

US pilots reported heavy enemy movement southward across the Plaine des Jarres on 22 December. In addition, a Communist message between elements of the 316th Division artillery battalion refers to "phase two" and to movement to a high point apparently located near Tha Tam Bleung. The Communists may also be moving forward the 130-mm. field guns that they used against the irregular fire support bases on the Plaine.

The North Vietnamese thus appear to be taking advantage of bad weather, which is hampering air strikes and reconnaissance, to move their forces into position for a drive against the defenses around Long Tieng, particularly Ban Na and Tha Tam Bleung.

Irregular troops are continuing to filter back into friendly lines near Long Tieng where they are being resupplied and reorganized. One group of 500 men withdrawing from the Phou Seu area reported clashing with North Vietnamese units east of Ban Na. Irregular units suffered heavy casualties during the recent fighting on the Plaine, and some 1,000-1,200 men are still missing. North Vietnamese intercepts have referred to the capture of large numbers of irregulars--perhaps as many as 650. All of the irregulars' heavy weapons--ten 155-mm. and nine 105-mm. howitzers--were lost, along with other heavy equipment. The government, however, is quickly replacing the lost artillery, and is moving six battalions into Long Tieng from elsewhere in Laos.

A North Vietnamese intercept indicated the Communists were aware of these reinforcements.

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INDIA-PAKISTAN

The US Consul General reports that about 100,000 Biharis--non-Bengali East Pakistanis who generally supported Islamabad--are living in a state of terror on the outskirts of Dacca. Despite efforts by the Indian Army and the Mukti Bahini, anarchy reigns in the area with criminal elements freely looting, killing, and torturing. The food situation for the Biharis has become critical, and the Consul General believes that many, if not all, will die either by starvation or torture. The senior Indian commander in Dacca does not yet seem to realize the gravity of the situation, and the new Bangla Desh government is making no effort to alleviate the problem.

* * *

President Bhutto is moving quickly to reshape Pakistan's domestic and foreign policy and to build a highly personal, authoritarian regime. Bhutto appears to be in complete control for now, largely because of his own stature and forcefulness in the face of the demoralization of the previous leadership. Social reform, redistribution of wealth, and populist assaults on the West Pakistan "establishment" are all aspects of his domestic strategy.

In moving Mujibur Rahman to house arrest, Bhutto is trying to indicate to New Delhi his desire to open negotiations. His insistence that East Pakistan is still part of the country is for domestic consumption only, and privately he seems to accept that Bangla Desh is lost.

Bhutto's unprecedented call on Ambassador Farland on Wednesday evening was for the purpose of expressing his willingness to forget his past critical attitude toward the US and to note Pakistan's extensive financial needs. Bhutto also called on the Soviets and the Chinese.

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CUBA

Castro has asserted publicly that Cuba's recent seizure of the two Panamanian-flag ships stemmed from concern that a new wave of Cuban exile operations was at hand. In a lengthy and belligerent speech on 22 December, reminiscent of some of his more strident anti-US performances of the past, Castro railed against what he termed US culpability in 12 years of "pirate attacks" against Cuba. He also implied strongly that if "defensive" measures against such activities were to result in a violent incident involving the US, "it would be incidental, accidental, and imperialism would be responsible."

Exile raids have long been a source of genuine concern to Castro, but this elaborate show of anger seems calculated primarily to shore up flagging domestic support and arouse foreign sympathy for his regime. He has used this tactic with considerable effectiveness in the past. Havana can be expected to play up any allegations of US complicity that are made by the crewmen before Castro releases them, as he has promised to do.

In commenting on the fate of US citizen Jose Villa Diaz, captain of the Johnny Express, Castro said that he would be placed "at the disposal of Cuban authorities" to answer for his "numerous illegal acts" against Cuba. He went on to indicate, however, that any leniency would stem from such factors as the attitudes shown by Villa's relatives still in Cuba.

This suggests that the regime may be prepared to show clemency.

Panama has accepted a Cuban invitation to send a delegation to discuss the ship seizures. A three-man team left for Havana yesterday.

In extending this invitation, Castro clearly is showing he is not angry at the Panamanians, but he may try to persuade them to move to prevent the use of Panamanian-flag ships by Cuban exile groups.

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ANNEX

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